

The following story was taken by Mr. L. Smith and Maj. Carlton, from the lips of the narrator herself, who is described as a young woman of prepossessing appearance, modest and unassuming in her manners and of a remarkably strong mind. She has been taken charge of and assisted by Gov. Merriwether and other prominent and respectable persons of Santa Fe. The publication of her story has created a deep feeling of indignation in Santa Fe.

#### A Narrative

*Of the sufferings of Mrs. Jane Adeline Wilson, during her captivity among the Comanche Indians.*

I was born in Alton, Illinois, on the 12th day of June, 1837, and am, therefore, in the seventeenth year of my age. My father's name was William Smith; my mother's maiden name was Jane Cox. I had five brothers and four sisters. I think it was in the year 1846 that we moved to Missouri and settled at a boat landing or ferry, called Jamestown, on the North Grand river. My father kept the ferry.

About eight years ago we moved from this place to Texas, and settled near Paris, in Lamar county. Here my father and mother died within one day of each other, leaving six orphan children behind them. Three of my brothers had died before the death of my parents. My eldest brother, who was in a ranging company, now came home to settle my father's affairs and make provision for our support. He secured homes for us with different neighbors, but took the youngest sister, our pet, with him to place her with one of our aunts.

One day's journey from the place where he left us he was attacked by the winter fever, and died in one week. I have three sisters older than myself. Their names are Elizabeth, Cynthia, and Caroline. My brother James and sister Ellen are younger than myself. Ellen was four years old when my parents died. Caroline is a dwarf, and the neighbors thought that the medicine the doctor gave her stopped her growth. She was a dear child and we all loved her because of her misfortune. (Here Jane was unable to restrain her feelings, and burst into tears.) I lived with several neighbors until the first of last February, when I was married to Mr. James Wilson, a young farmer just beginning life with a little property, consisting in cattle and horses. He was but nineteen years of age when we were married. We knew but little of life for I was not yet sixteen. I fear we were crazy in getting married while we were so young. (Poor girl! when her thoughts went back to this period of her life she wept as if her heart would break.)

We had heard that people became rich very fast in California, so we concluded to move and commence life in that distant country. We gathered together the little property we possessed and joined a party of emigrants consisting of fifty-two men, twelve women and several children. The father and brothers of my husband were among this number. There were in all twenty-two wagons, and the whole company was placed under the command of Mr. Henry Hickman. We started from Hunt county on the 6th of April last, and took the route for El Paso. We arrived at the Guadalupe Mountains about the first of June. Here the Mescalero Apaches stole from us nineteen head cattle; six men started in pursuit, but were driven back by the Indians. We went thence to El Paso. My husband not being able to travel with Mr. Hickman's train, he determined to remain at El Paso till the arrival of another party of California emigrants. Five of Mr. H.'s men staid with us. While here, the Mexicans stole nearly all the property we had, and left us unable to proceed on our journey. We could do nothing now except make our way back to Texas.

About the last of July we started on our return, with the fragments of our property which the thieves had spared. On the first day of August, my husband and his father left us, and fell into the hands of the Indians. I saw them no more after this. I was told that they had been murdered. You may perhaps be able to imagine my feelings when I found myself thus bereaved and destitute in a land of strangers. My misfortune seemed greater than I could bear, but I knew not that heavier trials were in store for me.

Unable to continue my journey, I returned to El Paso, where I remained till September 8th, when I started once more for Texas with my three brothers-in-law, in company with a small party consisting of five Americans and one Mexican. Mr. Hart, who owned and commanded this train, having some business in Texas which required his immediate attention, traveled very rapidly, and I hoped in a few days more to be in the midst of my friends.

As we had only seen one Indian on the route we flattered ourselves that we should not be molested by any of the tribes which infest this route. When near the borders of Texas, some of our own party stole three animals from Mr. Hart, and ran off. Mr. Hart anxious to overtake the thieves started in pursuit, taking with him my eldest brother-in-law, a lad some fourteen years of age, leaving myself, a Mexican, and the two boys to follow as rapidly as we could. We were at this time within three days' journey of a military post at Phantom Hill, and were considered out of danger. A discharged soldier being unable to keep up with us was some distance behind, but I saw nothing of him after this. The day after Mr. Hart left us, as we were travelling, about noon, we saw two Comanche Indians charging upon us in front and at the same time two others were seen driving up behind. We were all very much frightened, and the Mexican jumped out of the wagon and went towards the Indians, in order, if possible, to gain their friendship.

The mules in our wagon, four in number, becoming frightened by the war-whoop of the savages, turned out of the road and commenced running as fast as they could. One of them fell down before we had gone far, and the others were then obliged to stop. The Indians now came upon us, and ordered the Mexican to take the mules out of the harness. While this was going on, I got out of the wagon, and looked on in breathless suspense. After the mules were unharnessed, the Mexican was stripped of his clothing, his hands tied behind his back, and ordered to sit down upon the ground. One of them went behind him and shot him with a gun, while another stabbed him several times with a large butcher knife. His scalp was cut off before he was dead, and put into his own hat; the hat was then worn by one of his murderers. I was stupefied with horror as I gazed on this spectacle, and supposed that my turn would come next. But the Indians having secured the plunder of the wagon, mounted us on the mules and ordered us to go with them.

As I left, I looked back and saw the poor Mexican weltering in his blood, and still breathing.

We took a northeast direction, and traveled slowly till sunset, when we encamped. Here the plunder, consisting of blankets, bedding, clothing, bridles, and some money which I had in my pocket, was divided among the Indians. Some articles considered useless were thrown into the fire. My clothing was taken away, except barely enough to cover my person. In the distribution of the captives, the eldest boy, about 12 years of age, was claimed by the chief; I became the property of one of the others. I should have mentioned that one of our captors was a Mexican, who had been stolen from the State of Chihuahua when an infant. He was now as savage as the Indians, and claimed the youngest boy for his prize. The scalp of the Mexican was stretched on a stick and dried by the fire.

After giving us some meat for our supper, the Indians began to secure us for the night. The boys, with their arms tied tightly behind them, were taken under guard by two of the savages. My feet were tied together, and I was obliged to lie between the other two. I did not sleep any during the night, for I was afraid of being killed.

The next day we resumed our journey, and traveled in the same direction. The boys were mounted on good animals, and had bows and arrows. Their faces were painted Indian fashion, and they looked like young savages. They appeared to enjoy this new mode of life, and were never treated with excessive cruelty. I was mounted on a good horse, but being obliged to sit astride the animal, the journey was exceedingly painful.

I had a very fine head of hair, which I valued very much. But the chief ordered it to be cut off; I was not a little mortified in seeing it decorating the heads of the heartless savages. My head was thus left entirely unprotected from the intensely hot rays of the sun.

Nothing of interest occurred except repeated acts of inhumanity towards me, until the twelfth day, after my capture. At this time we were joined by two Indian men and a squaw. These were all the Indians I saw till after my escape. Up to this time my sufferings had been so severe as to take from me all desire to live, but now they were greatly increased. The squaw, from whom I might have expected some compassion, was evidently the cause of the new cruelties which I now began to experience.

My horse was taken from me, and I was mounted on an unbroken mule without a bridle. I had a saddle, but it was worn out and good for nothing except to torture me. This animal would frequently top me over its head of its own accord; but not being wild enough to gratify the malice of the Indians, the chief would sometimes shake the Mexican's scalp before its eyes. The beast would then rear and plunge in the utmost fright, and I would be thrown upon the ground with great violence. I have been tossed from the mule's back as many as half a dozen times a day, and once I was so stunned that I lay a considerable time before my senses returned. My repeated falls greatly amused the Indians, whose horrid peals of laughter might have been heard a great distance.

I never saw them exhibit the first sign of pity towards me. It made no difference how badly I was hurt, if I did not rise immediately and mount the animal which had just thrown me, they would apply their riding whips, or gunsticks, or the end of a lariat, to my unprotected body with the greatest violence. The squaw would also help me to rise by wounding me with the point of a spear which she carried. You may understand one object the Indians had in view in putting me upon this wild animal and causing me to be thrown so often, when I tell you I expected to become a mother in a few weeks. They understood my situation, but instead of softening their hearts it only made them more inhuman, and subjected me to greater sufferings.

I was obliged to work like a slave while in camp; while there was any service to perform I was not allowed a moment's rest. I was compelled to carry large loads of wood on my back, which being destitute of sufficient clothing was mangled till the blood ran down to my feet. I had to chase the animals through briars and bushes, till what little clothing I had was torn into ribbons. I brought the animals to camp in the morning, and had to watch them till they were ready to start, and if one more wild than the rest ran off, I must chase and bring him back, and then be knocked down by the savage chief for my want of skill. When all were ready to start I had to catch and saddle my own wild mule, without assistance. If the party did not start immediately, I was compelled to pull at the end of a lariat which the Indians would fasten to a bush. They seemed to study every method of putting me to death by piecemeal.

Exhausted by incessant toil and suffering, and extreme anguish from my wounds, I could not work as fast as the Indians desired; and often when scarcely able to stand, and hardly knowing what I was doing, I have been required to do the work of the strongest man. And because of my inability to accomplish my task satisfactorily, I have been whipped until my flesh was raw. Large stones were thrown at me. I was knocked down and stamped upon by the ferocious chief, who seemed anxious to crush me like a worm beneath his feet. My head sometimes fell under the horses' feet, and then the Indians would try to make the beasts kick me. After all was ready for the day's journey, I was obliged to travel as fast as the others, riding sometimes over rocks and through bushes, aching and sore from head to foot, and exposed alike to cold and heat, sunshine and storm.

I have gone two days at a time without tasting food. The Indians depended on

hunting for their subsistence, and sometimes had nothing to eat themselves—unless there was an abundance of food, I received little or nothing—when any game was killed, the Indians would tear out the heart, liver, and entrails, and eat them raw. I suffered exceedingly from thirst; I was not allowed to drink, except while in camp. We frequently crossed beautiful streams during the day, and I would beg the privilege of dismounting to quench my thirst. But the Indians would always deny my request with contempt. It was in vain that I pointed to my parched tongue and head blistered in the rays of the sun. Nothing could soften them into pity, and I ardently desired death that my torments might come to an end.

Every indignity was offered to my person which the imagination can conceive. And I am at a loss to know how I have lived through the barbarous treatment which was inflicted upon me. Frequently my feelings were so outraged that I was tempted to kill my inhuman masters. My indignation burned particularly against the chief, and I thought if I could only cut him to pieces I could die content.

We traveled every day—we usually started about 10 o'clock in the morning, and halted about 4 in the evening. The Indians were accustomed to go to the tops of the highest hills and stand there gazing in every direction. We always spent the night on a hill and were thus exposed to the cold autumn wind; we slept on the ground, generally without covering. When it rained the Indians made a tent of the blankets and wagon sheets they had stolen from us, but I was not allowed to take shelter in it; I preferred sleeping outside in the storm.

After my mule had become so gentle that I could ride it without being thrown, it was taken from me and I was obliged to travel on foot. The road over which we passed was often rough and stony, and full of thorns. My feet were wounded and bruised till they were covered with blood and greatly swollen. But still I was obliged to keep up with the rest of the party, and if I fell behind I was beaten till I was nearly senseless. The Indians often urged me on by attempting to ride their horses over me—many a mile of that road is marked with my blood, and many a hill has echoed to my useless cries.

I traveled thus on foot some five or six days. After the party were ready to start in the morning the direction of the route was pointed out to me, and I was required to go before the others, in order not to hinder them. They usually overtook me before I traveled far. I had always intended to make my escape as soon as I found an opportunity. I never expected to reach any friendly settlement, but I did not wish to give the Indians the pleasure of seeing me die. On the morning of the twenty-fifth day after my capture, I was sent on in advance as usual. I had eaten no breakfast, and was very weak, but the hope of escape now supported me. I hastened on as fast as I could, and finding a suitable hiding place I turned aside and concealed myself in the bushes. After this I say nothing more of my captors. I found afterwards by the tracks of the animals that they had searched for me; they probably thought I would die, and therefore took less trouble to find me. I have no doubt that the next time they pass that way they will look for my bones.

My situation was now distressing beyond all description; I was alone in an Indian country, some hundreds of miles from the nearest friendly settlements. I was without food, without shelter, and almost without clothing. My body was full of wounds and bruises, and my feet were so swollen that I could hardly stand. Wild beasts were around me, and savages, more wild than beasts, roamed on every hand. Winter was coming on, and death in its most terrible forms stared me in the face—I sat down and thought of my lonely and exposed situation. But I could not weep; my heart was too full of woe. I remembered the events of the few preceding weeks. The husband of my choice had been murdered, and I was not allowed the melancholy privilege of closing his eyes and seeing his remains decently interred. My little property had been stolen, and when within a few days' march of sympathizing friends I was captured by savages,